



COLOSSIANS
ABOVE ALL THINGS

STUDY GUIDE

COLOSSIANS

ABOVE ALL THINGS

Paul's letter to the church at Colossae is powerful. It speaks with the highest language about the Preeminent One, the Christ. Few scriptures paint such a wide and captivating picture of Jesus, which makes us wonder what occasion would draw out such a majestic vision? It is hard to know for sure. Colossae was a city in the Lycus River Valley near the cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis which is in modern day Turkey, so likely full of pagan worship, but also a place where many Jewish people may have landed after exile. We have no specific statement of what Paul is addressing in Colossae, but it is clear that no festival participation, no elemental spirits, and no human philosophy can make humanity true and good.

For this kind of salvation, the One who is above all things would come to us...

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SESSION ONE

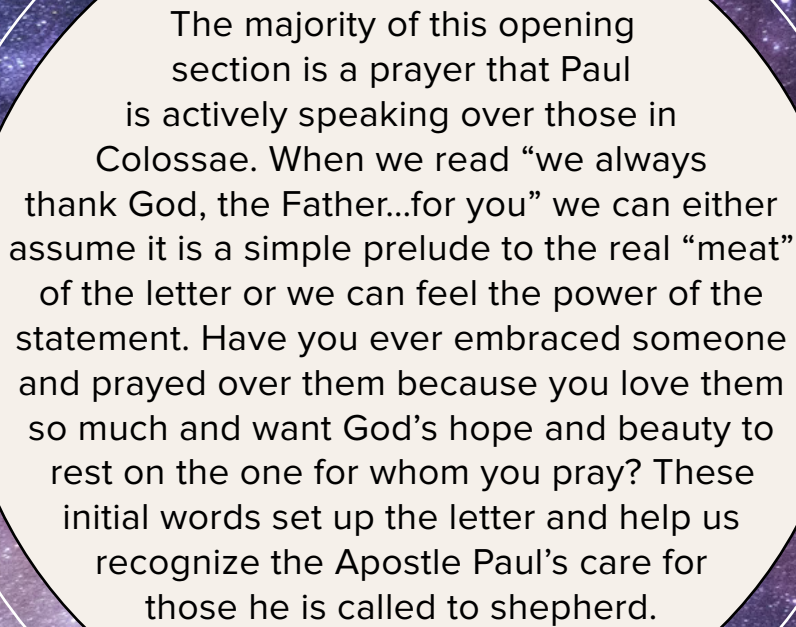
COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

²To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father. ³we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.



The majority of this opening section is a prayer that Paul is actively speaking over those in Colossae. When we read “we always thank God, the Father...for you” we can either assume it is a simple prelude to the real “meat” of the letter or we can feel the power of the statement. Have you ever embraced someone and prayed over them because you love them so much and want God’s hope and beauty to rest on the one for whom you pray? These initial words set up the letter and help us recognize the Apostle Paul’s care for those he is called to shepherd.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. For those who may be less familiar with the New Testament, take a moment to describe a bit about Paul and Timothy in Scripture (Acts 16:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:5).
2. Think of the last situation over which you prayed with thanksgiving. Describe it. How can you grow in this effort? As you continue to read, what is Paul's prayer for the people of Colossae?
3. In verse 4-5, faith, hope, and love are included together. How would you explain how they work together and does it matter what stands as the object of the faith, hope, and love? Where is another place that Paul talks about these three?
4. When the Apostle Paul says "always thank" in verse 3, he is using a form of the word that is now used for communion. How does this inform our understanding of participation in the Lord's Table? He uses it again in the same passage. Compare the two uses.

5. Read the first six verses of the Epistle to the Galatians. What's missing there compared to the opening of the letter to the church at Colossae?

6. Define the "gospel" as best you can. Now look at Paul's use of the word in verse 5. Does it fill out your definition at all? Explain. What is Paul saying the "gospel" is doing?

7. When you read "filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" do you feel that is reasonable or does that seem too high for you? Explain.

8. In English there is something called a participle that takes an action word (verb) and makes it a descriptor (adjective) by adding "ing" at the end. List the words that seem to be participles (vv. 10-12) after Paul prays "walk in a manner worthy the Lord, fully pleasing to him." How many are what his audience should do? How many seem to be happening to them? In Paul's thinking, what is the appropriate response to Jesus?



PARTICIPATION IN **THE KINGDOM**

This introduction from Paul sets the scene for the rest of the letter. Prayer. Thanksgiving. Fruitfulness. These are all outworking of one who “walks in a manner worthy.” Are you prayerful or is it something you do every now and then? Are you thankful regardless of the circumstance? What about fruitfulness? Do you look like an apple tree brimming with delicious and beautiful fruit, or are you more like a Christmas tree, decorated for a few days a year but actually no longer attached to the roots and soil of life? The truth is we all want to be fruitful, but it requires some effort, a participation of sorts. God is intent on accomplishing His kingdom work through our lives, so we should be active in our faith, clinging to the Beloved Son.

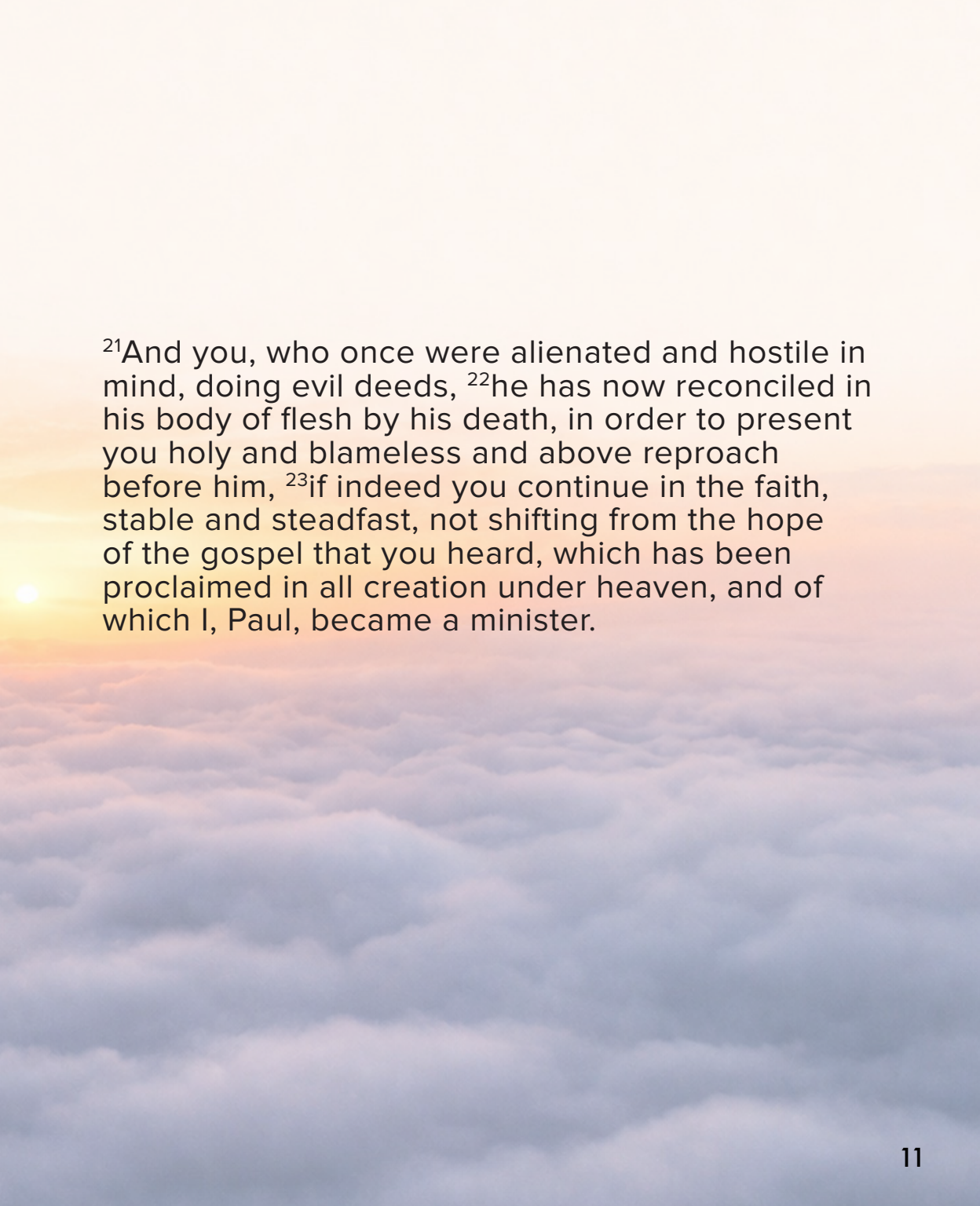
At such an early stage in the letter to the Colossians, what might be a couple of areas in your life where you know you should be “more fruitful”?




SESSION TWO

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.



²¹And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.



When we hear the word “image” our minds should be taken back to the original story in the Bible where the image bearing vocation is first given to Adam. Paul wants us to remember the meaning and purpose of what a human is intended to be and do. By contrast, he is also painting a picture of the preeminent One to whom there is no comparison.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Genesis 1:26-28. Discuss the nature of what an image bearer is charged to do and how that effort has gone throughout the Old Testament.
2. Christ is not a created being, but twice the term “firstborn” is used in this passage. Find them, put them together and discuss what they might mean.
3. Read Exodus 4:21-22 and Psalm 89:19-29. When we read “firstborn” we often assume a point in time or as a beginning. What is the point of “firstborn” in these passages and what does Paul want us to understand about Jesus by connecting “image” and “firstborn”?
4. List all the descriptors of Jesus in vv. 15-20 and the description of different domains (e.g. heaven and earth). Why might Paul begin his letter this way? What types of challenges might he be planning to address later in the letter?

5. This passage says that everything was created “through him” and “for him” and “in him all things hold together.” What does it say about His death and crucifixion? What does that say about your life minute-by-minute?

6. Reading back to Colossians 1:13-14 from the last session and adding 1:20-21 from this session, what has the preeminent One achieved? For whom?

7. What does reconciliation require? Do you have a personal situation where you experienced reconciliation? Explain.

8. If you feel comfortable, share how you would agree with Colossians 1:21 from your own life.

9. There is a big “if” in Colossians 1:23. When you come across this language that assumes a level of participation in what Jesus has done, how do you respond? Do you think you aren’t supposed to put effort in? Do you think you are somehow saving yourself? Does this remove the idea that you are saved by grace? Discuss.



PARTICIPATION IN **THE KINGDOM**

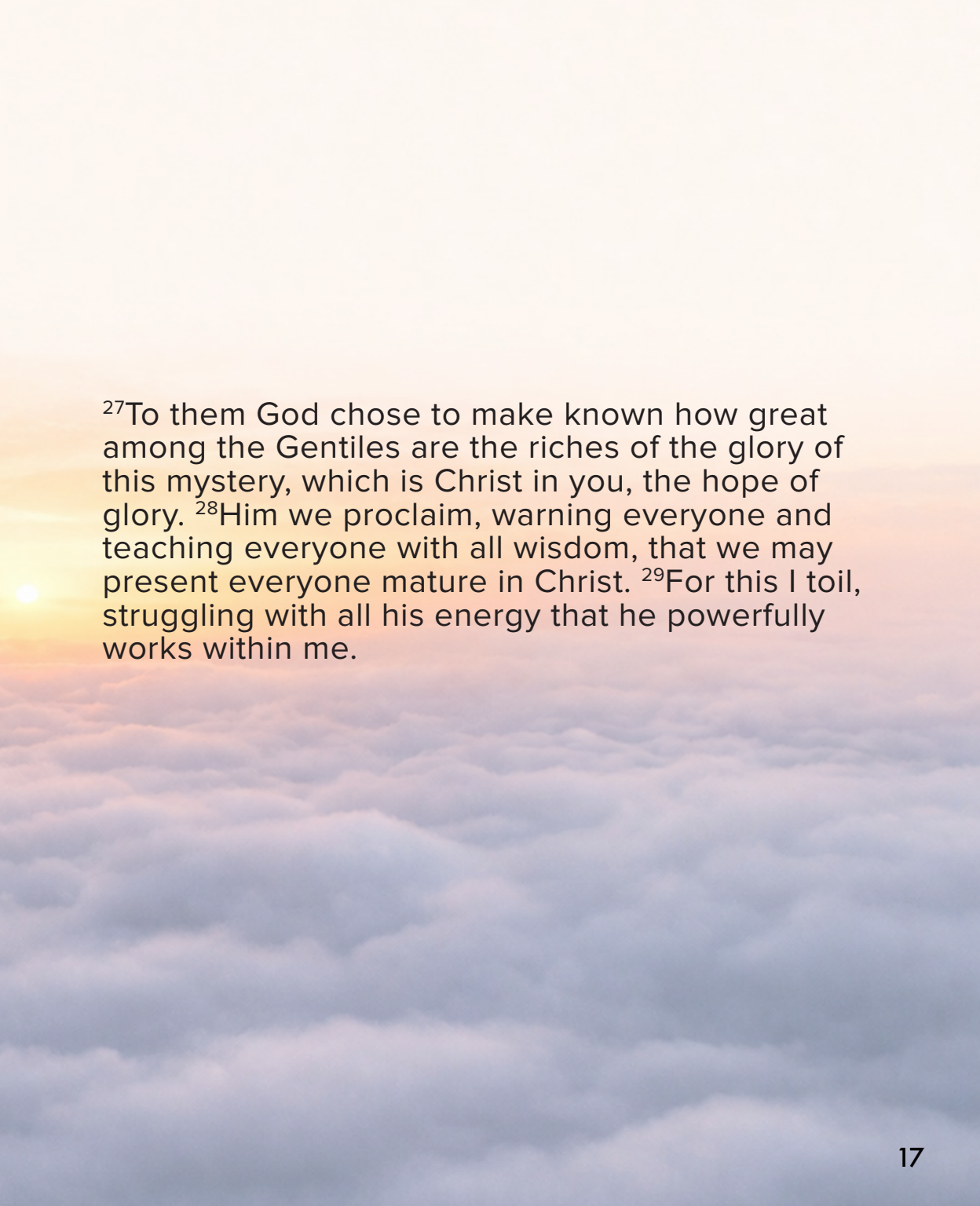
Jesus is unrivaled and essential. He is the perfect image-bearer, the firstborn, meaning the one with preeminence like Israel or David in the Old Testament. No one who can touch Him or challenge His authority and stature. In fact, Paul says He holds the fabric of reality together. The last time you prayed, did you consider that every breath and heartbeat is a gift, and that creation (including you) is being held together by the hand of this One who is listening to your prayer? Much of our lack of faith can come back to this question—who is in charge and are they both powerful and good? We who were alienated and hostile needed to see how far the preeminent One would go. This peace came at a price. His blood. Jesus is the Reconciler. He is bringing all things back to the Father for good and we are called to be a part of it. We cannot shift from “the hope of the gospel.” Do you trust that the gospel is true?

The passage seems to indicate that it is Christ’s desire “to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him”. What keeps you from believing this is true? What keeps you from believing it is possible? Let the good news of Jesus Christ dethrone any idea that would allow you to believe otherwise. Why not pray with someone this week to help remind you of this truth and the truth of the gospel?

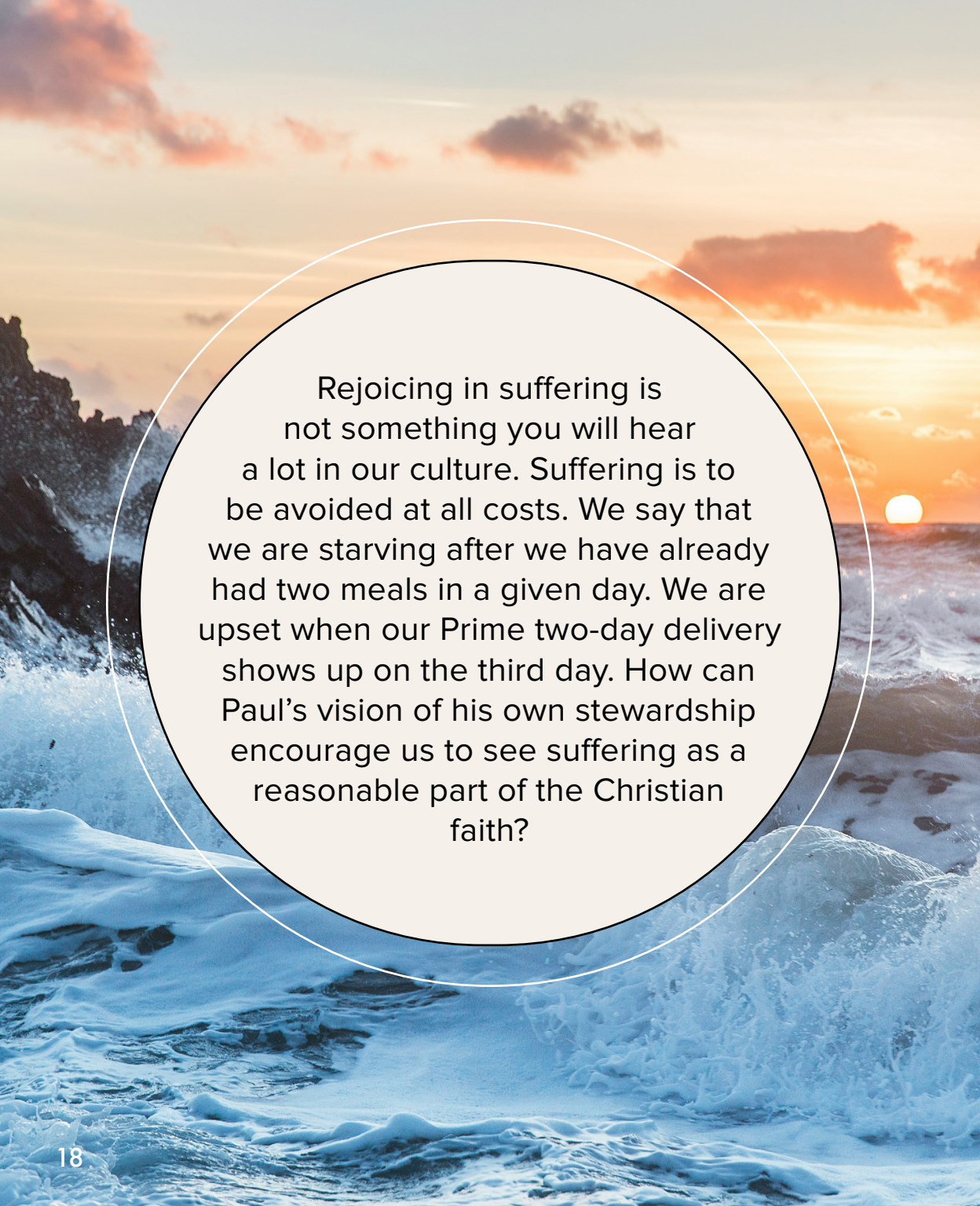
SESSION THREE

COLOSSIANS 1:24-29

²⁴Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.



²⁷To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.



Rejoicing in suffering is not something you will hear a lot in our culture. Suffering is to be avoided at all costs. We say that we are starving after we have already had two meals in a given day. We are upset when our Prime two-day delivery shows up on the third day. How can Paul's vision of his own stewardship encourage us to see suffering as a reasonable part of the Christian faith?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul says he is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.” Is he saying he is adding to the work of Christ or something different? Who are these afflictions on behalf of?
2. Generally speaking, what would be required to rejoice in one’s suffering? What would make suffering worth it for you?
3. What is the “mystery” Paul speaks of here? The idea is filled out more in Colossians 2:2 and 4:3.
4. Wisdom has been brought up before in Colossians 1:9. Read Proverbs 8:12-36. What would be a good picture of wisdom in the mind of someone like Paul? What accompanies it?



PARTICIPATION IN **THE KINGDOM**

What would you look like if fully mature in Christ? If God is all-knowing and all-powerful, don't you think that He holds the perfect version of you in His mind? You know, the best version of you. In Galatians, Paul would even say God "who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace."

He also knows you right now. The imperfect "you." Maybe even the rebellious "you." This is the beauty of the gospel. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us, or as Paul has explained in this letter, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." The gospel tells us we were worth His toil and suffering.

Take a few moments to imagine the version of you that God has in mind. Do you want to go that direction? What are some small things that would need to change today to get you closer?

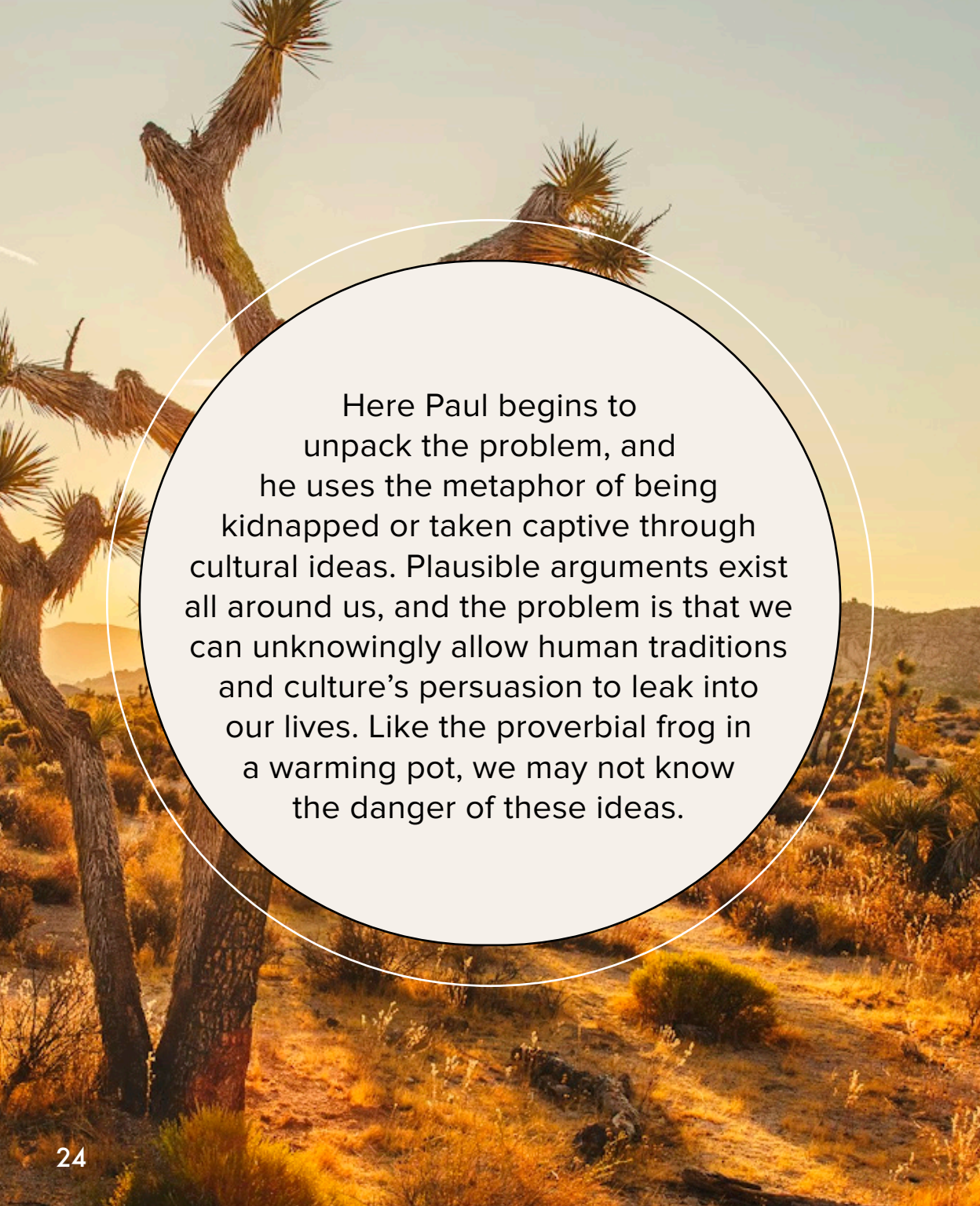
SESSION FOUR

COLOSSIANS 2:1-15

¹For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ²that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

⁶Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

A photograph of a desert landscape at sunset or sunrise, featuring several Joshua trees with their characteristic spiky leaves and branching forms. The ground is covered in dry, yellowish-brown vegetation. A large, white, circular graphic with a thin black border is centered over the image, containing a block of text.

Here Paul begins to unpack the problem, and he uses the metaphor of being kidnapped or taken captive through cultural ideas. Plausible arguments exist all around us, and the problem is that we can unknowingly allow human traditions and culture's persuasion to leak into our lives. Like the proverbial frog in a warming pot, we may not know the danger of these ideas.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time you struggled for someone who did not know you “face-to-face.” Why did you do it?
2. Paul’s struggle (and the toil and struggle from last session) are intended to have an effect. What is it and how do you imagine it being helpful?
3. Paul has described Jesus as “head” twice so far in Colossians. How do they fit together and how does it further Paul’s argument against philosophies and human traditions?
4. Put together the ideas in Colossians 2:6-7. What are the things that happened already? What are the things Paul wants to happen now and into the future?
5. Discuss the implications of Colossians 2:9, especially when considering Paul's inclusion of the word "bodily."

6. What are the human traditions and philosophies that can take us captive today? Have you ever discovered one of these philosophies drawing you away from the faith?

7. Circumcision was a part of the old covenant and goes back to Abraham. Read Genesis 17:9-14. What was the purpose of it?

8. Here Paul brings together old covenant circumcision and new covenant baptism. Why would he bring together these two embodied symbols? Is he saying that people should be circumcised? Is he saying that they are the same? Explain.

9. What does Paul say was nailed to the cross and what was the result? What was actually nailed to the cross, and what does Paul want us to understand about the crucifixion?

10. Discuss the connection between Colossians 1:16 and 2:15. Who is Paul talking about?



PARTICIPATION IN **THE KINGDOM**

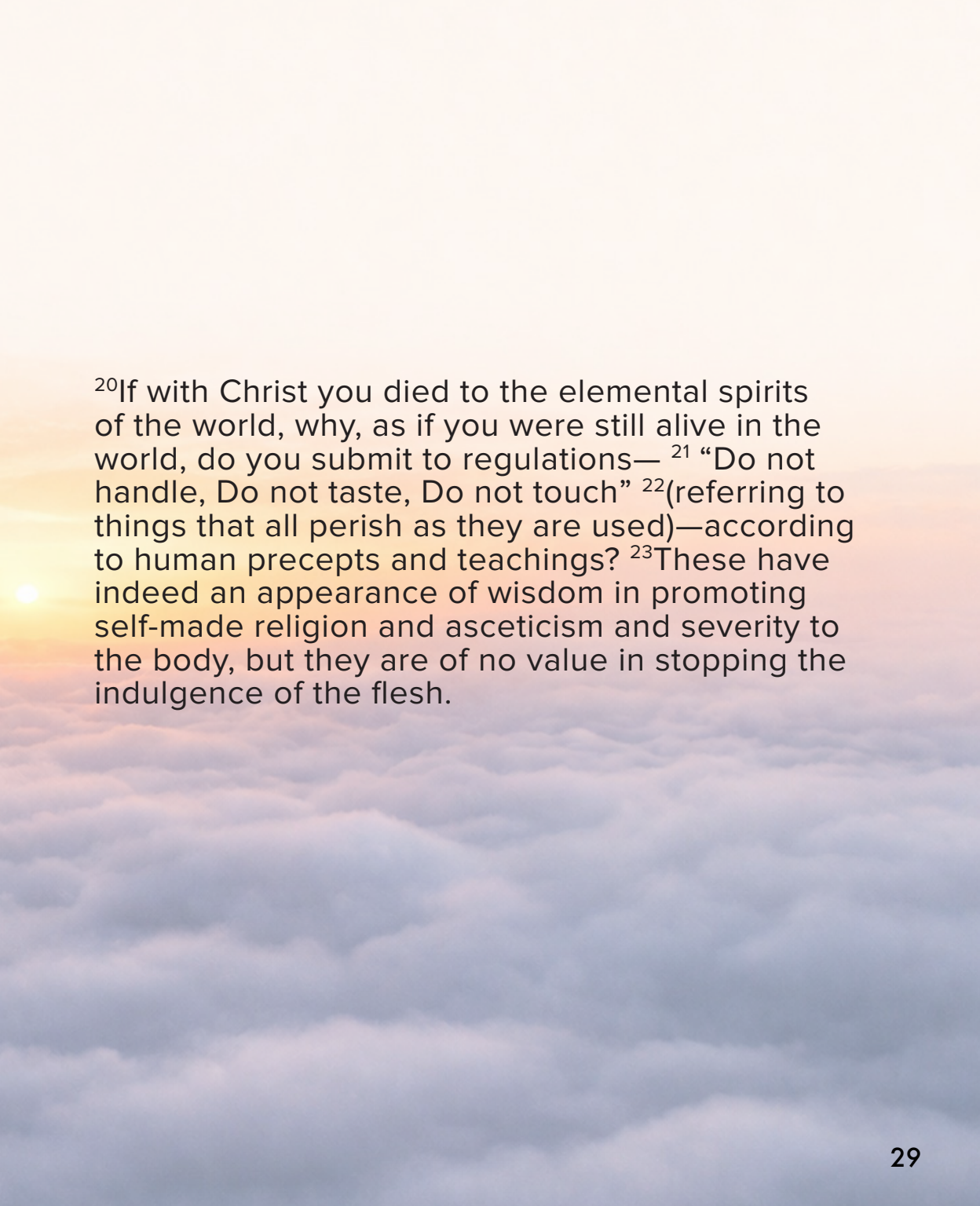
Walking a path of self-denial or even suffering requires a motivation. To rejoice in such a difficult path requires a love that far exceeds one's desire for comfort or safety. Paul uses several images to display such a love. "Knit together in love," "reaching all the riches," finding "hidden treasure," "rooted and built up." At the center of all of these images is faith that relies on Christ Himself. He is the Knitter, the Riches, the Treasure and the Root and Foundation. He is the Head of the church and everything else, and Paul implies that our baptism retells the story of what He has done and His resurrection. As circumcision to an Israelite, baptism tells the story of the One to whom we belong. Though we have been deceived and have given ourselves to the powers and principalities, he conquers them, shames them, and He leads us in triumphal procession. We die to our earthly motivations and self-determination. We die to the thought that we can form ourselves out of the dust and breathe life into our existence. How can we see this truth? When our eyes glance slowly up the foot of the cross to see our debts paid through His body, His blood.

How can you release your grip on comfort and safety this week for the benefit of others and the truth of the gospel?

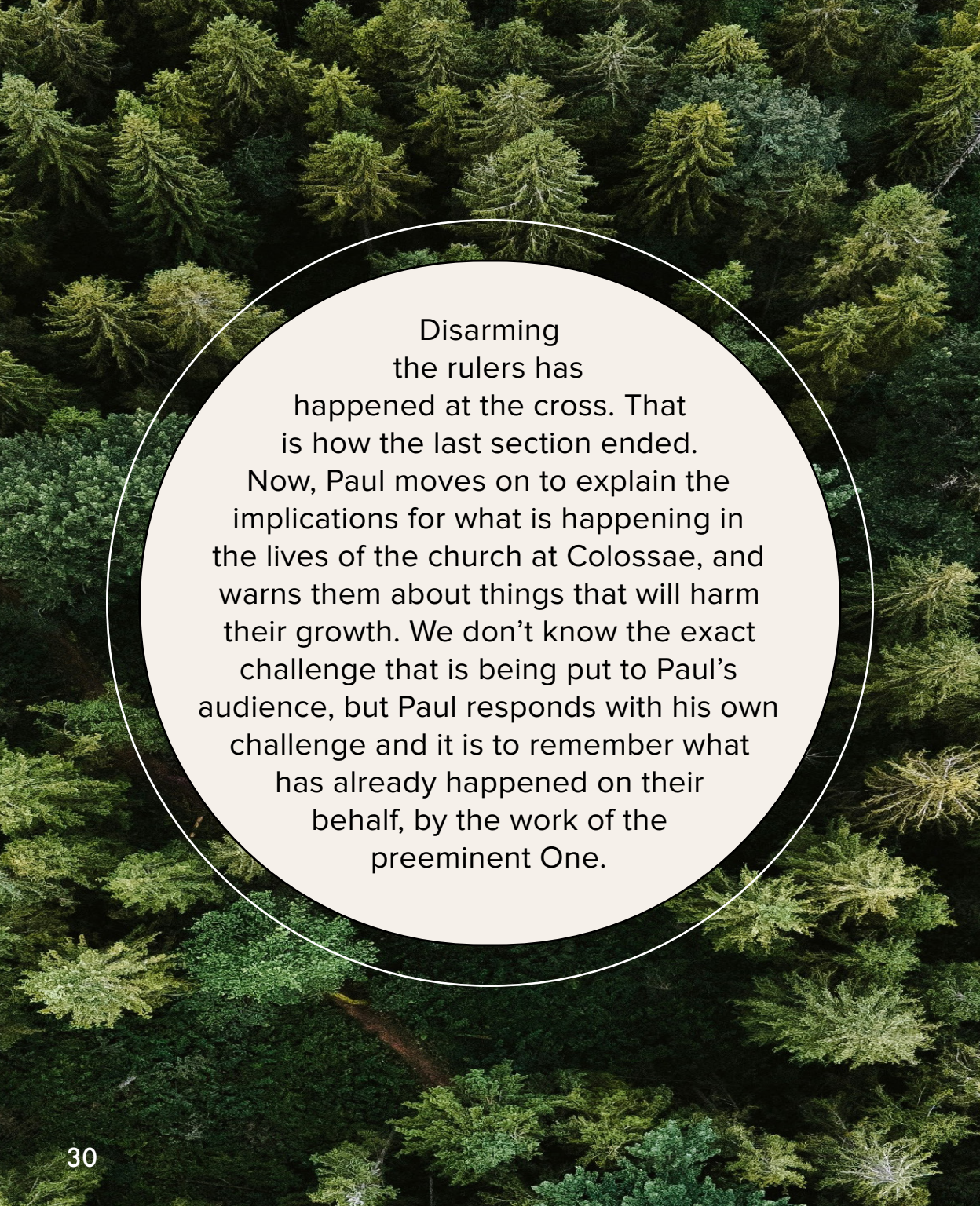
SESSION FIVE

COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

¹⁶Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.



²⁰If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— ²¹“Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” ²²(referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? ²³These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.



Disarming
the rulers has
happened at the cross. That
is how the last section ended.
Now, Paul moves on to explain the
implications for what is happening in
the lives of the church at Colossae, and
warns them about things that will harm
their growth. We don't know the exact
challenge that is being put to Paul's
audience, but Paul responds with his own
challenge and it is to remember what
has already happened on their
behalf, by the work of the
preeminent One.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Ezekiel 45:17. How might this passage in Ezekiel inform what Paul is saying here? Who might be “passing judgment” in verse 16?
2. Read Hebrews 8:1-5 and 10:1-4. How is the author of Hebrews using the word shadow? How might it help our understanding of Paul’s use here in verse 17?
3. In Colossians 2:16, 18-19 a contrast is being made. What are the differences in the two descriptions?
4. Have you ever had someone “pass judgment” on you in regards to your faith? Maybe they said you were disqualified by something you did or did not do. Was the reason valid? If you were new to the faith, how would you know if they were right?

5. What is asceticism? Is it as much of a problem in today's culture? Explain. What might be a comparable challenge in today's culture?

6. This is the second time "elemental spirits" have come up in Colossians. Go back to Colossians 2:8 and compare with its use here in 2:20. Now read Galatians 4:1-10. How would you describe these "elemental spirits"?

7. In Colossians 2:20, Paul offers an unusual phrase about his audience, saying "as if you were still alive in the world". We know he is not speaking to dead people, so what does he mean from this passage, and what earlier part of Colossians speaks of death?

8. Self-made religion, asceticism, and severity to the body are linked together and Paul says "they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh." Do you agree? What is Paul's point? How might this setup the next section?

9. Read Colossians 2:23 use of wisdom. Go back and read Colossians 2:3 and compare how they are used. What seems to be the source of wisdom in each case?



PARTICIPATION IN **THE KINGDOM**

What is the difference between a shadow and the thing that is casting the shadow? The shadow gives a view of the truth, but how the light is cast upon the real thing can exaggerate the shadow, stretching or squashing the reality. Whether Jewish, pagan or from our modern era, each has been brought up in a system of thought, a way of life. What if that way of life has been based upon shadows? Paul is making this point. Both Jew and pagan ways are living off of shadows, and he is reminding his audience that they are **NOT** alive to this world or these elementary systems. In baptism, they have died to it, “having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.” The real substance of their life comes from something else, rather Someone else. This is why simply saying “no” to one’s self, isn’t enough to stop self-indulgence. Something else is required, rather Someone else.

How much of your old way of living holds on today? How can you let go of the shadows and grab a hold of real substance in our Christ?


SESSION SIX

COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

¹If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

¹²Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

A scenic landscape featuring a river in the foreground, lush green trees on the banks, and towering, rugged mountains in the background under a clear blue sky. A large white circle with a thin black border is centered over the image, containing text.

Previously, Paul made clear the worthlessness of self-made religion with an outward appearance of wisdom, yet lacking the power to truly transform. What is shadow and what is substance? In this section, Paul answers by calling us to set our minds on reality found fully in Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “You have been raised with Christ.” In verses 1 through 3, Paul grounds readers in identity before providing instruction in the verses that follow. Why might that be important?
2. How do you “set your mind on things above?” (Phil 4:8; Ps 1)
What does that look like in your everyday life?
3. What do you think Paul means by your life being “hidden with Christ in God?” What could this suggest about your security and relationship in God’s presence? (Ps 27:5, John 10:28-30; Rom 8:38,39)
4. Wrath is mentioned twice in this passage. What makes God’s coming wrath in verse 6 different from the wrath Paul warns believers to put away in verse 8?

5. Why does Paul insist followers of Jesus must ‘put to death’ what is earthly in themselves? (Rom 8:13; Phil 1:6)

6. What is idolatry in your own words? Share Bible passages that inform your definition. How is idolatry different from or the same as the list of vices preceding it in verse 5?

7. Create a “put off” list from verses 5-9 and a “put on” list from verses 12-17. What stands out as you compare these two lists? Which seems more difficult to you personally? Why?

8. Paul emphasizes the love, peace, forgiveness, and gratitude that are essential to Christian community. What makes these challenging to practice? What makes them possible?

9. What does it mean to “do everything in the name of Lord Jesus?” How might this idea connect back to Genesis 1:26, 27?



PARTICIPATION IN **THE KINGDOM**

Paul describes the Christian life like changing clothes. The old “garments” no longer fit who we are in Christ. We are called to lay those old things aside and take up what is new. This new life is rarely quick or easy, but God is patiently shaping us to reflect what He has already declared to be true. In Christ, we are given everything we need to be clothed in compassion, humility, patience, and love. This work happens both individually and collectively. God is actively sanctifying the Church, His Body, where Christ is all, and in all.

When you find yourself clinging to the old or struggling with the new, remember that there are others who have also wrestled and are willing to help. Invite a trusted believer, your small group leader, or a pastor to come alongside you with biblical strategy and prayer as what is earthly in you is put to death. Your victory over sin has already been secured in Christ. As you wear what reflects Him, you display the love of Christ to the world.

Take an honest look at your life. What are you holding onto that no longer fits? What better thing has Christ set before you in exchange? Put it on, beloved!

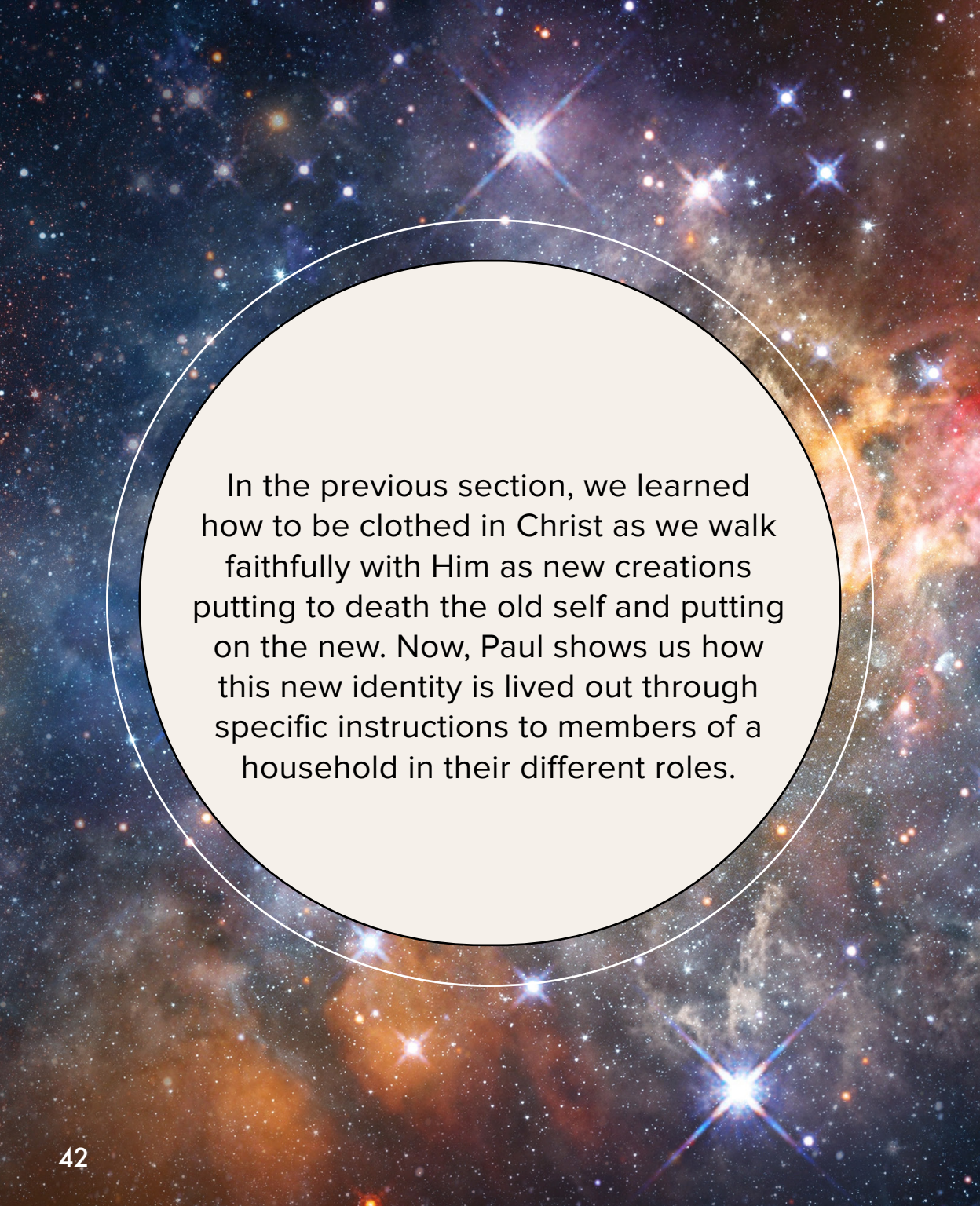
SESSION SEVEN

COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:1

¹⁸Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. ²²Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

²³Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

^{4:1}Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

A vibrant, colorful nebula with stars and a large white circle containing text. The background is a deep space scene with a mix of blue, orange, and red hues, filled with numerous stars and bright, multi-pointed starbursts. A large, white, circular area is centered on the page, containing a paragraph of text.

In the previous section, we learned how to be clothed in Christ as we walk faithfully with Him as new creations putting to death the old self and putting on the new. Now, Paul shows us how this new identity is lived out through specific instructions to members of a household in their different roles.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. List the roles in an ancient household to whom each instruction is given in this passage. What do these roles have in common? Consider how many times “the Lord” is referenced in this short passage.
2. Which relationships in this passage apply to you personally? Which one does Paul identify with frequently in his relationship to Jesus? (Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1). How does this inform our own position before the Lord?
3. Verse 18 calls for a wife to submit to her husband as is “fitting in the Lord.” How might that phrase frame what it means to submit in this context? Read Daniel 3:16-18; Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1-7. Discuss the implications of these scriptural boundaries.
4. Paul warns fathers not to provoke their children “lest they become discouraged.” What might fatherly provocation look like? Why is a child’s discouragement the result Paul calls to attention? Share any personal experience that may speak to this principle.
5. Do you understand the legal relationship between bondservant and master in Paul’s time? Share any insights from a Bible commentary with the group (and help those newer to the faith in how to find reliable answers). What modern relationship might benefit from these instructions?

6. Think about familiar stories in the Bible involving husbands and wives, children and fathers, or servants and masters. In what ways do those stories help clarify what it is, or is not, to live “in the Lord” through human relationships?
7. Eye-service is contrasted with sincerity of heart and fear of the Lord in verse 22. What is the difference between these motivations? What might this reveal about what God values? (1 Samuel 16:7; Jeremiah 17:10; Luke 16:15)
8. Paul tells bondservants they will receive the inheritance as their reward. How do you understand the relationship between being a servant of Christ and an heir with Christ? (Galatians 4:7; Philemon 1:14-16) Does this influence your attitude towards work?
9. Why might Paul include a warning to wrongdoers within the bondservant’s instruction and not in the other relationships listed? Does this warning apply beyond this relationship? What is revealed about God’s justice?
10. Masters are told they also have a Master in heaven. Should that inform how we think about authority, leadership, and responsibility today? How does this look in your home? Workplace? At church?



PARTICIPATION IN **THE KINGDOM**

Individually, we are children of the Father. Collectively, we are the Bride of Christ. By choice, we are servants of our Master. In every role, we live under the authority of God in Christ. Sin corrupts that order, and we experience its effects in every relationship as we await His promised return.

How should a Christian love, obey, and work in a broken world? Follow the example of Jesus, who has not left us alone in this work. He has given us His Spirit to sustain us. We have put on the new self, being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.

Do you find yourself under the authority of the unjust? Take heart in the truth that no one stands outside of God's authority. He will bring justice. This is something we entrust to Him. We too deserved His judgment, yet in His grace, Christ bore our penalty and presents us sinless before the Father.

Are you living as if any of your life falls outside of Christ's authority? What would it look like to live more fully "in the Lord" in that area this week? Share it with your small group and pray together that the Lord brings that transformation for His glory and your good.

SESSION 8

COLOSSIANS 4:2-18


²Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

⁵Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

⁷Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, ⁹and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

¹⁰Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. ¹²Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. ¹⁴Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. ¹⁵Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. ¹⁷And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.”

¹⁸I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.



Living under the authority of King Jesus isn't always easy, but it is always right. Paul has shown us how Christ rules over our closest relationships and now broadens his focus to include devotion to prayer and witness to outsiders, before pointing to some of the faithful men and women around him as living examples of this kind of life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul calls believers to be steadfast in prayer, watchful, and thankful. Connecting these ideas to his prayer in Colossians 1, how do these work together to advance the gospel? Share examples from Scripture or personal experience.
2. Thanksgiving is a repeated theme in Colossians. What is the opposite of gratitude? How do you recognize a lack of personal gratitude, especially in challenging circumstances? How does thanksgiving reshape your perspective? (Colossians 1:3; 11-12; 2:6-7; 3:15-17; 4:2)
3. How would you describe your prayer for others? What helps you remain consistent in prayer as Paul describes? What makes it difficult?
4. Paul assumes regular interaction with “outsiders.” Who are the outsiders in your life? How well do you “walk in wisdom” and make “the best use of time” with them? (Colossians 3:2; Romans 12:2; Titus 2:11-13)
5. Jesus calls His disciples the “salt of the earth” in Matthew 5:13, and Paul says our speech should be “gracious, seasoned with salt.” Why use this image? What does this kind of speech look like in practice?

6. What stands out in the way Paul describes his fellow workers in Colossians 4:7-12? What does this reveal about the nature of Christian ministry?

7. Read Paul's short letter to Philemon. Onesimus (mentioned in verse 9) is the subject of that letter. How would you characterize Paul's view of this "bondservant"?

8. Mark is named among those with Paul. Compare this with earlier tensions (Acts 13:13; 15:36-41) and later references (2 Timothy 4:11; 1 Peter 5:13). What could this reveal about reconciliation and growth in Christian relationships? Are there brothers or sisters you have grown with through tension and reconciliation?

9. Many are named here, but many more faithful people go unmentioned throughout history. Who are the quietly faithful in your life? Does that describe you? Which truths or scriptures help you remain thankful when you feel unseen?

10. As you reflect on this epistle as a whole, what has strengthened or changed in your walk in Christ? Where is God calling you to grow?



PARTICIPATION IN **THE KINGDOM**

As this epistle closes, Paul's instructions on prayer, speech, relationships, and faithfulness show what life under our King looks like in practice. We pray as those dependent on Him, speak as His representatives, order our relationships under His authority, and live with faithfulness as His people. He is the King above all (Colossians 1:15-20), the Lord in whom we walk (Colossians 2:6-7), and in Him our lives are hidden and secure (Colossians 3:1-4).

Jesus is the divine King and His rule is established and made visible in His people. Believers are called to live under His authority now and forever. The old ways of life no longer fit. Sin must be put to death as every part of life comes under His reign.

What you believe about Jesus matters and the evidence of that belief is shown in how you live under His rule. Where are you resisting His authority? Where are you tempted to take control? Bring it before Him and ask for grace to live as a faithful subject of your good and perfect King. You belong to His Kingdom and now live under His grace-filled reign.



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